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A P P E A L
TO THE
G O O D S E N S E
OF THE
I N H A B I T A N T S
OF
G R E A T B R I T A I N
CONCERNING
THEIR RELIGIOUS RIGHTS AND
PRIVILEGES.

YE KNOW NOT WHAT MANNER OF SPIRITS YE ARE OF.
LUKE IX. 55.

L O N D O N:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

AS the author of this work was prevented from correcting the sheets, he hopes the reader will attend to the table of Errata, which is given below, as otherwise many passages will be entirely understood, and the sense in others very much obscured.

E R R A T A.

Page 13 l. 26 for *no* to read *not to*; p. 16 l. 11 for *academies* read *academics*; *ibid* last line for *lenity* read *unity*; page 19 l. 18 before *might say* put *I*; page 34 l. 27, for *conscience* read *consciencs*; p. 36 l. 3 for *affliction* read *affection*; *ibid*. l. 4 for *than* read *then of*; p. 37 l. 12 for *executed* read *excused*; p. 38 l. 21 for *are* read *were*; p. 39 l. 7 for *denied* read *desfred*; p. 42 l. 21 for *had* read *bath*; p. 48 last line for *protested* read *protected*; p. 51 l. 10 for *contrary* read *arbitrary*; p. 52 l. 30 for *causes* read *cases*; p. 55 l. 20 for *where* read *whose*; *ibid*. l. 24 for *bishops* read *bishoprics*; p. 56 l. 12 for *truths* read *truth*; p. 60 l. 30 dele as *Bull*; p. 72 l. 2 for *presentation* read *presentations*; p. 77 l. 6 for *registered* read *prevented*.



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THE
P R E F A C E.

THE following appeal to the good sense of the inhabitants of these kingdoms, does not pretend to direct their judgments upon so important a concern as their religious principles. It is designed only to represent to them many of the corruptions which have crept into christianity since the first promulgation of it, the causes from which they have arisen, and the means by which they have been supported, particularly in the church of England. And in consequence to excite them to use their best endeavours towards a reformation. I cannot flatter myself, that I have advanced any thing new upon these subjects, to those who are versed in ecclesiastical affairs, and have made proper reflections upon them. I may, however, inform, perhaps, some of those who embrace religion only as a conformity to custom, and never consider any other topics, but what they hear delivered from the pulpit, or are discussed in the pamphlets of a day. I may have placed some facts too which are well known, in a different light from what they have been viewed before, and deduced consequences from them which have escaped other authors. The world will judge, however, of the merits of the piece in this respect, as they will determine its value in every other. But although I should not be so happy as to effect either of these purposes, I hope I shall be excused from censure in this publication, from another circumstance, that I have
added

THE PREFACE.

added to the scale of those friends to religious liberty, who are now endeavouring to remove every restraint upon the human conscience, and restore it to a perfect freedom of enquiry. This is the era, when, if a reformation of religion will not be effected, yet the genuine truths of it will be laid open to the view of every member of the community, and ignorance will no longer be allowed to be a cover to craft. But in a cause of such importance, to be silent is a crime, even though little knowledge should be distributed by a publication, every one therefore who is a friend to such principles is called upon to assist in it, and demonstrate by numbers, as well as judicious reasoning, the expediency of a revolution. As such I enter the lists with many of my fellow countrymen, though I lament at the same time, that I cannot defend it so strenuously as I could wish. Society, I think, calls upon every member of it to do as much service to the community as lies in his power. And this seems to me the most probable means by which I can fulfill my duty to it. I am in hopes then that the candour of the world will excuse me from officiousness, or a deluded vanity in this appeal which I present to it. I may be mistaken in my views, but I never can in my intentions.

It may be necessary likewise, that I should make an apology for some things, which I may be thought to have advanced too boldly, and which may be construed derogatory to the good order of Society. I hope, however, the spirit of the times will excuse me from such a censure. And besides, as I think that a truly religious man, who has studied the scriptures, and acts conformably to them, is a better member of society than a mere formalist in religion, who adheres to it because it is established by law; I may depend upon being justified to every candid person, and to every candid government, even whilst I aim at destroying all human authority in spiritual matters, nay, even that of an act of parliament itself.

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S E C T. I.

RELIGION is a treasure so important and interesting to mankind in this world, and so valuable with respect to their eternal salvation; that the protection of it in its greatest purity is of the utmost consequence, and ought to be the principal concern of every age through which it passes, and of every people amongst whom it is professed. This however is far from being the case. Christianity has met with the greatest difficulties in its first establishment, and its succeeding progress in the world. No age has exhibited so much the simplicity of its doctrines, and the justness of its precepts, as the unnatural and depraved

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praved manner in which it has been propagated. This has necessarily begot an entire alienation from it in many men otherwise of sense and erudition. Such men as would have become its most powerful patrons, and whose protection would have been its firmest support.

The sources from which these and other disadvantages have arisen are many and various. What would fill a volume to recount, what would astonish and distress a thinking yet compassionate man to be acquainted with. They may all however be referred to one original, the infringements of human power, and the subjection of religion to a set of men, who because they are invested with authority to do *justice*, are often swayed by their passions and their prejudices to the most injurious actions. As men, they partake of every folly and are exposed to the influence of every vice, with the rest of their fellow creatures. I do not mention this to depreciate the authority of civil magistrates whether supreme or subordinate. They are designed to be venerable and respectable persons. And in the suppression of vice, where the rule is strictly drawn and cannot easily be mistaken; may and often are very useful instruments in the hands of Providence. As such we revere and would wish to obey them. But when

when they interfere in matters of opinion, especially in opinions which relate not to this world; they depart from their province, and expose themselves to the disobedience as well as the contempt of every sensible man who is oppressed by their power. In this we never can respect them, nor can desire to obey them till they derive their authority from an higher source than they can justly plead. From God himself, and from that degree of reason which he allows his creatures in their judgment of his laws.

Let us then attend a little more particularly to the objects over which they have so unnaturally assumed an authority, point out the motives by which they seem most probably to have tyrannized over the consciences of mankind; and describe the means by which they have, especially in our times and in our nation effected their purposes. A history indeed which fills the human mind with horror, as it is the history of corruption and hypocrisy, two of the most depraved principles to which humanity is subject.

Whatever right may by the violence of usurpation or the insinuations of fraud and injustice, be assumed over the actions of men, however we may be influenced by fear and terror to yield our natural liberties

into the hands of arbitrary sway ; our opinions we can never yield to any power or to any force : For over these even our own wills can never be exerted. To believe that our senses do not inform us of what is presented to us ; to believe that fixed and settled demonstrations have no existence but in our brain ; and to believe that what is exhibited as true must be conceived as an error ; what human power can dictate to our understandings ? Human power may indeed oblige us, to profess certain opinions which we believe to be false. But such a profession is a disgrace to our nature and can never be made even upon the most trifling subjects, but under the severest restraints of compulsion : For even in these cases it is an offence against truth, which is one of our most respectable virtues. But such a profession in *religious* sentiments is a crime as atrocious as the objects are important against which it is exerted. Which are the most important upon which we can ever be employed. And is an offence not only against truth, but against the God of truth, who has created us to enjoy every benefit of our nature, and expects us to yield this sacrifice of obedience to him.

It is undoubtedly a vicious compliance in mankind, by any means to yield the free liberty of their actions into the power of another

another. And wherever it is justly made such exchanges may be demanded as may fully compensate for the loss which is sustained. Such as security of property and a protection from danger. For men settled in a community, a demand must sometimes be made for their services, to protect the young and innocent as well as the aged and infirm, that they may return with gratitude the good offices they have received themselves; and that when they shall again want assistance they may demand it from their fellow-creatures. The loss of human liberty therefore depends upon a compact made between one man and another, that constitutes a *public* or general good, which every man in society is obliged to support. But our opinions we can exchange with no other. They are entirely personal. If our actions are conformable to the good of the public: If our services are devoted to the welfare of the community with which we are associated whenever it shall require them of us, and if as good citizens we abstain from those iniquities which are dictated by principles of injustice; it matters not to society what our opinions may be. That cannot possibly be made the better or the worse for them. They are the private property of every individual, which can never be compensated by any reward, and over which

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no human power can exert any force. There are some opinions indeed which may have a tendency to corrupt the human heart, and may influence weak men to the commission of the most atrocious crimes, instigate them to immoral and injurious actions, and stir up the seeds of sedition and tumult. The individual however even for these is subject to no punishment, whilst he conceals them from the world, and the propagation of them is an act of the will, and an infringement of those ties by which he is bound to society. Religious opinions are entirely speculative however with regard to this world, unless where they respect moral conduct; and there they promote those actions only which are most friendly to society. In other points they relate to a compact betwixt God and man, which is by no means cognizable by any sublunary laws.

It would seem exceedingly ridiculous for any human government to interfere in medical opinions, and to ordain with the same pomp and solemnity which have been affected in religious matters, that particular disorders should be cured by those medicines alone which whim and caprice might approve: And yet physic is an object of great importance to the human species. It would be equally ridiculous in government

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to interfere in questions of morality and metaphysics, and yet human laws depend very much upon moral institutions. Nay politics themselves when not levelled against the reigning form of administration, have remained almost entirely free from the interposition of the civil power. And every country has received, if not adopted systems very different to what were acknowledged by the people. Sydney is read in France. Machiavel has been published in England. Philosophical sects which prevailed in the world before the christian æra, all of them espoused doctrines contrary to the mythology of their respective countries; many of them denied a future state of retribution which was faintly imagined in their fables and stories and insisted on without any authority by their priests; and some explained away every principle of religion and morality.

The christian religion was preached amongst the Jews and propagated amongst the Heathens without any injunctions, nay without any expectations of the interference of human authority. Notwithstanding this it flourished for many centuries. And it might have flourished in the same manner for ever, had not discord and animosity occasioned an appeal to the power of a magistrate where reason alone should have decided

cided or nothing at all, and introduced an ascendant from which it has never been able to extricate itself since. Had Socrates pretended to be a divine teacher, and had his disciples endeavoured to destroy the heathen mythology, and to make his system of morals a system of religion too; and had the preceptor of Alexander influenced that monarch to establish this philosophy wherever he fixed his standard; the school of the academies might have occasioned as much disturbance in the world, as christianity did under Constantine or as Mohammedism under the Impostor. But the antient philosophers were either not so ambitious or not so artful as the christian divines. Indeed they were not inspired to see the universality of their doctrines, as the first christians were of their belief. They were not therefore so zealous in propagating their opinions, and although Aristotelism has had its devotees and its martyrs; yet this has only been when christianity has shadowed it under its wing.

Christianity did not appear as a sect of philosophy, it stood in no need of human learning, nor was designed to be a complete system of morality. The purport of it was to enforce virtue upon the minds of men upon additional motives. It proclaimed however aloud the lenity of God. It had

had a tendency to destroy all kinds of idolatry and break down the fence even of Jewish superstition. The character then which it put on; viz. as a system of religion, seemed destructive at first of those glorious effects it was intended to produce, the reformation of mankind. For by this the various corruptions were introduced, with which it has since been overwhelmed, and which have greatly retarded its progress. Although it was designed to destroy the order of priesthood, so iniquitous in every religious establishment, yet such an institution offered advantages which human nature was not willing to yield. Christ came to destroy the law, and with it no doubt an order which was so tyrannical over the Jewish people. He came too to destroy idolatry and the order of priesthood in heathen nations so intimately connected with it; with all the secret mysteries which belonged to their institutions. But Christians were too fond of the emoluments of priests not to derive every worldly advantage from them, and they adhered to the institution of priesthood and that of the mysteries also. Riches and power have such attractive charms, that even the pure precepts of the gospel, the example of Jesus Christ and his disciples, and the many prohibitions of worldly advantages which our religion insists upon,

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had no influence over minds, which were disposed to nothing so much as avarice, and over men who had vanity enough to think themselves inspired even whilst their whole character was contradictory to the precepts of their master. To engage the wonder and astonishment of their hearers rather than to reform their lives, to teach them mysteries rather than reveal the true sense of the gospel to them, and to inspire them with a veneration for the sacred character of the priesthood rather than an attention to the truths they promulged ; the teachers of christianity soon found would increase their reputation and the number of their followers, and at the same time satisfy their ambition and their avarice. The processes of reason are slow and languid, and although they are more certain and sure upon this account ; yet it requires a length of time and the utmost industry to gain proselytes to its cause : It requires also a depth of understanding, whilst mystery may be propagated by the most ignorant, as indeed it is fit only for such hands. Besides this, terror likewise is one of the most considerable instruments which enthusiasts can wield against the consciences of men ; and where ambition dictates, such persons have never failed to use it, to the sacrifice of the peace of their fellow creatures, and to the aggrandizing

grandizing wealth to themselves. But the reasonable and intelligent man, who understands the scriptures and is honest enough to propagate their truths with integrity, will avail himself of no argument which is not warranted by the will of his master. He will avoid then every thing which may triumph over the understandings of mankind, and instead of pluming himself upon a higher degree of wisdom, will endeavour to make others as wise and as intelligent as himself.

We need not refer to any history, replete as it is with facts, for the truth of these assertions. Our own times will readily acquaint us with the influence of these means over the consciences of men. Whoever has resolution and confidence enough, might say, whoever has dishonesty and dissingenuity enough, to tyrannize over the credulities of his fellow creatures, will gain not only proselytes sufficient to make him very popular, but will increase his fortune as well as his reputation. But if his doctrines are such as he himself does not thoroughly understand and of consequence can never explain to his hearers, or if he does understand them is unwilling they should be explained; he will be so much the more esteemed and rewarded. If too he mixes terror and despair in his tenets, if he exhibits

a dark, beclouded and melancholy view of nature and of mankind, if he threatens eternal damnation to those who will not join him in his enthusiasm, he will soon find that weak men, willing to catch at every straw which is offered to them, will naturally flock into him, not because they are really convinced of his doctrines, but because they wish to be, and because their fears are more powerful than their reason, which make them dread his censures, rather than trust to their own judgement. They are willing to be right, and therefore resign their opinions to men who are more wise, but are not a whit more honest than themselves, nor in the least desirous of leading them in the right path.

There is nothing so dangerous as wisdom in the hands of dishonest men. They are acquainted with every art to conceal the truth, and they know how to involve it in the specious pretext of error. We ought then, if we are ignorant, to examine into the hearts of those who would teach us, before we trust ourselves to the direction of their heads. Every honest man knows how to preserve the character of probity, but he may not always be fortunate enough to be wise. Honest men however are too apt to be credulous, and those only who have practised dishonest arts themselves are the most liable

liable to be suspicious of other men. Knaves know this, and are therefore cautious before the fellows of their gang, whilst they practise all their sophistry upon those with whom they are certain to succeed.

It may seem harsh perhaps to apply the foregoing sentiments to religion and the professors of it. But if we trace the progress of that amiable institution from the first beginning of it almost to this æra, we shall find that ambition and avarice, aided by hypocrisy and fraud, have been the principal causes of its corruption, and have been the sole motives upon which human authority has gained such an ascendant as it has over the consciences of men. When priests were established to teach mankind the truths of the gospel revelation, to make them better citizens and happier in every domestic circumstance, if they fulfilled their duty in these particulars there was no room for cavilling or disputes with each other. But when bad men were admitted into their order, who were instigated by ambition and avarice, to promote their own interest rather than the good of their followers; they were willing to insist upon, if not invent any doctrines which might contribute to this end, and to appeal to any authority which could support their designs. When authority was applied to upon such an occasion,

caſion, and to ſupport ſuch principles what can we expect from it? For human power to ſupport the cauſe of reaſon and free enquiry is a ſolecism. They are ſufficiently able to defend themſelves. To ſupport any other cauſe, muſt certainly be unjuſt, for every other cauſe muſt be dictated by thoſe narrow and bigotted principles, which are incompatible both with the doctrines and precepts of religion.

Thoſe who eſpouſe the cauſe of reaſon and free enquiry in matters of religion, appeal to the underſtandings of mankind alone, truſt to their own perſuaſions for their aid, and want no human authority but the ſanction of men of ſenſe to ſupport them. Human authority or civil reſtraints muſt be abſolutely incompatible with the firſt principles of reaſon; for can any government, by reſtrictive laws, ſupport that which is liable to change, and human reaſon cannot ſubſiſt if we deprive it of this affection. There are opinions we muſt confeſs which every profeſſor of religion will and muſt ſupport, ſuch as reſpect our moral conduct and behavior. Theſe however the civil magiſtrate from rules of policy is bound equally with the miniſter of religion to maintain. But in theſe every chriſtian is agreed, except thoſe who ſet up a magiſterial tribunal to inſiſt upon more. More cannot be inſiſted

insisted upon, by any human power whatever. Reason disavows its influence because it does not want it; and bad principles and a bad conduct only can desire it, because it is the sole means by which interested views can be secured to mankind.

We may see then very plainly, that the great objects of religion, making men better, and enforcing a life of piety and virtue by eternal rewards can never be disputed. And in fact, disputes never were raised from such topics as these. Whoever attempted any thing of this kind, would be immediately denounced an enemy of christianity, and the greatest foes otherwise to each other would join in this case to oppose him. Disputes in religion have arisen from much slenderer sources. Sources indeed so slender, that when we think of the persecution and bloodshed which has ensued upon them, we can hardly believe human nature so weak, and the followers of Jesus Christ so wicked, as to make them the pretext of their cruelty. I cannot believe but that more cogent motives must have prevailed to encourage a spirit so exceedingly malevolent. I will endeavour therefore to shew that this was really the case, and that an appeal to human authority, and the support of bigotry, must be derived from bad principles of the heart, much more than from any polemical

mical disputes which might happen amongst the first teachers of christianity.

S E C T. II.

IN the first ages of this religion, so amiable to mankind and so friendly to their eternal interests; men embraced its doctrines who were not only persons of distinguished understandings, but might be well versed likewise in the philosophy of the antients. To establish a similarity then in doctrinal points, between religion and the sect to which they belonged, as in moral points such a similitude was already established, was natural and cannot be wondered at. The friends to distinct sects therefore would conceive of christianity, in a different manner from each other, and might carry the apothegms of an heathen school, into a church which breathed only peace and good will to mankind. Disputes however from this source might in some places be prosecuted with that calmness that is natural or at least consistent with the character of philosophers. In others they might excite a degree of warmth that is natural to men. But I can never think they could by any means contribute to that spirit of bigotry
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with which the christian church has been so much harrassed. A few good men, warm in a cause which they imagined to be true, might be elated a little too much perhaps by the heat of argument, in the disputes which might frequently happen in those hours of religious society that was constantly held amongst christian ministers. To think however that some traitors should not mix in these assemblies, were to think more honourably of the disciples of Christ after his decease, than of those apostles who were his constant companions during life. Amongst these was a Judas, whom avarice tempted by the love of wealth, and whom ambition influenced by a false idea of power, to betray the object of his best affections, his friend, his everlasting benefactor. How many Judas's may we not suppose, to assume the character of religion, and mix with its votaries in every age which bears its date. And although the methods they might embrace to betray their master may be different from that of the apostle ; yet they have done it as effectually, and to much better purpose to themselves. Or although they embraced the means which were so plainly held out to them, they endeavoured to avoid the dishonourable end to which he exposed himself.

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That such were the principles however which subjected religion to human authority, I must believe as long as I know our natures are frail, and that bad men are always fond of insinuating themselves into good company, when any worldly advantage is to be obtained by it.

To this may be objected, that as christianity appeared to the world very different from a sect of philosophy, and was immediately opposed to the religion, to the superstitious practices, and the diabolical mysteries of Pagan institutions; as soon as a Roman emperor embraced its tenets, it was natural he should protect it from insults, and thus as it were by accident introduce all the evils which we would account for differently.

But give me leave to say, that protecting it from insult as a general scheme of simplicity and purity, was very different from interfering in personal disputes, upon doctrinal points, appointing and over-ruling councils and establishing his opinion in doctrine as well as in practice. Indeed though the christians were very much persecuted by the Roman emperors, yet christianity authorised no retaliation upon this account. And a virtuous heathen who could not conscientiously comply with the doctrines of the gospel, was justified in his refusal to embrace it.

it. For christianity appeals only to the conviction of its votaries. Human authority then has no power to make christians even of those who disbelieve its tenets; how much less can it have to make sectaries, where opinions can so little interfere with the interests of mankind. But to gain a point by the sword is so much more easy than by reason and persuasion, that it is no wonder ambitious men have saved themselves so much trouble, when they held the power in their own hands. We can only lament, that whilst they exercised it, they assumed a character to which they had so little pretensions.

It cannot be denied likewise, that a fondness for opinion, might be so exceedingly heightened, as to connect religion itself with a system which was entirely human, and thus might beget that spirit of bigotry, which from its universal nature one would imagine natural to mankind. But bigotry has never flourished in such vigour, as when protected by the authority of powerful princes. And then indeed it has produced all the ill effects in a religious cause, which one would imagine could be dictated by the worst of demons. Ambitious men paved the way to secure the emoluments of religion by human authority, and many good men even might relax a little in their duty,

where they found an infallible security, and be fond of protecting error in such a case, if not by violence, yet by counsel and advice. To think that every priest who has winked at the power, or screened himself under the wing of political establishments in religion, and the interference of a civil magistrate, is a dishonest man, would be to think the most dishonourably of some of my fellow creatures, whose best principles should direct them to the contrary, and whose characters are set apart as examples of virtue to the rest of mankind. There have been men of the greatest purity in their religious sentiments, and of the utmost integrity in their practice, who have been distinguished for these qualities under every establishment, the most corrupt as well as the most simple. But is not their adherence to the church, a flaw in their characters; and would they not have shone forth as much brighter examples, if avoiding the strides of ambition, they had opposed any infringements on their personal opinions? We admire the integrity and steadiness of Luther, who when he was sensible of the evils of the church of Rome, resisted them with all that firmness with which he was naturally endued. If every christian minister was a Luther, or if christian ministers had always made the same use of their abilities,

lities, or of their virtues, as he did ; should we ever have had an establishment of popery, should we ever have had a creed, or a subscription to particular articles in England ?

It would be needless to examine the particular disputes which happened amongst the first christians, have been frequently renewed since, and are now in as great a suspense as ever. It is sufficient for us to say they are all uninteresting, and of little importance to the christian's faith, much less to his practice. Is it possible that the nature of Christ's essence whatever it be, could influence men more or less to virtue and integrity, or could alter their ideas concerning the motives upon which the eternal interests of mankind are to be promoted ? Christ came to speak the will of God, will any connection then with the supreme being, alter his decrees, or disturb the authority from whence they proceed ? A dispute upon such matters may make men worse, it can never make them better ; it might make them worse, because it might invalidate the real evidences of christianity, and the true nature of the divinity himself ; or might induce men to trust too much to a saviour whom they had invested with such extraordinary powers, and too little to themselves,

selves, who are answerable alone for their conduct.

I will mention only one doctrine more of christianity, because it has been much disputed amongst christians; and we must confess, as it is capable, that it has really bred much ill will amongst them. For it is a doctrine which is shocking to humanity, and I hope I may be excused, if even in this treatise intended to promote charity and universal benevolence, I pronounce it impious, and highly unbecoming the God who made us, and the Saviour who has redeemed us from destruction. It is the doctrine of election, which if any one will shew me can be productive of a good action, I will renounce all pretensions to truth and honesty; for truth and honesty cannot subsist in my mind, with an opinion that both good and evil are predetermined by Providence, and that I have no power to communicate friendly offices to my fellow creatures, or to withhold from them my assistance. If too the generality of the world is condemned to be miserable, and notwithstanding all my just and upright endeavours, I am to be included amongst them, and only a few supercilious saints who presume upon the lenity of God, because they perform some external acts of devotion, are to be received into his bosom; I would rather
relinquish

relinquish all ideas of religion, than embrace it upon such terms. And every principle within me, would induce me to think Jesus Christ a greater impostor than Mahomet. For it is much better we should be flattered in some few vices, than that the effects of all our good and benevolent actions, should be destroyed. Upon such principles, however, creeds have been formed, and, in consequence of them, such beliefs insisted upon, as were inconsistent with the true spirit of religion, and the disposition of Jesus Christ. Every man, no doubt, has a right to enjoy his opinion; and even such sentiments as these, so whimsical, and, at the same time, so unjust, must not be thwarted, or torn by force, from the mind of its advocates. The great error was in obliging every person, who partook of the advantages of civil community, to confess this, or any other opinion, equally as groundless.

In about four centuries after the promulgation of christianity, it was embraced by the emperor Constantine; and the zealous, or rather the ambitious, were willing to yield the pre-eminence in religious affairs to him. But in this they appealed to a weak, silly, and ambitious man, to determine an affair which the wisdom of their

their counsels, and the depth of their learning, could not effect.

How ridiculous must they have thought such a decision, if it had not been seconded by power and authority. But such an influence gave weight to opinions, when they only struggled for victory, and lost sight of the argument by which they were supported. Can we think that men who did this, were actuated by principles either of religion or of reason? By religion they could not be, because they allowed, if they were in earnest, an ignorant man to determine against the opinion of the most inspired person who ever appeared on earth. They could neither be influenced by principles of reason, for then they must have thought the emperor wiser than themselves, a concession few priests will grant to princes, especially when they presume on the strength of their own abilities. They submitted then entirely to authority. They knew he was the conqueror of the world, and they were confident of his support against every attack to their disadvantage. As an honest man, if he was such, or as a prudent man, which he certainly was, he embraced the christian religion, and it was sufficient he should protect it against infidelity and paganism. To have done this in that decent and gentle manner, which
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it required, would have commanded only his countenance, and such a countenance, if christians could have agreed amongst themselves, would have spread it through the universe. But private dissensions prevented that public spirit which ought to have prevailed, and was necessary for the general propagation of the gospel.

Before I proceed any further, let me ask this question, which may appear a stale one to many of my readers, but which carries an invincible argument to support what I advance, If christianity were intended to become a public religion, and to be enforced even in practical points by a civil authority, why was not such an authority established by the great founder and promulgator of it? Why did he not satisfy the earnest expectations of the Jews, in creating an earthly kingdom. The Jews he might have made the conquerors of Rome, and of the world, and fixed at once the standard of religion and of power in that renowned city. But Christ appealed to the reasonable nature, not to the passions of men, and to the understandings of the most vulgar of his disciples. He availed himself therefore of no human authority, because he knew such a power was quite inconsistent with the influence by which he endeavoured to establish his religion, the

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influence of reason, and of common sense. It was the highest degree of arrogance therefore in an earthly prince, because he believed the doctrines of christianity, to propagate them in the unnatural manner which he did. But it was infinitely worse in the ministers of the Gospel to persuade him to it, and to engage him in a party, whose doctrines had no other tendency than to serve the most abandoned purposes.

Constantine may, indeed, in some measure, be excused from all the guilt which might lie upon him in this affair. He may be excused from the guilt of imposing his own opinion, whatever it might be, but not from that of imposing his authority. But such an authority is iniquitous enough. For as to opinions, if he was not well versed in sophistical arguments, he might be sufficiently acquainted with the doctrines of the Gospel, which are plain and intelligible to every capacity. I wont say, but that if he had imposed the most absolute authority, without any consideration at all of opinion, it would not have been better than the method he took to enslave the conscience of mankind. Had he indeed imposed his authority to silence every dispute, and reconcile the jarring opinions and animosities of all parties, he would have acted like a just and

and benevolent man, if he had forfeited the character of an artful and ambitious prince. But to summon a council of ministers, that he might give power to the majority, was only to encourage the spirit of faction and discontent, that he might avail himself of the spoil. For it gave birth to two parties in religion, to the most powerful of which he became the head, and who in return for his favours, would sacrifice to his vanity, whilst they served their own ambition. He established a general authority in religious affairs, and the priests of the party, which he espoused, were very willing to serve as his delegates, whilst they tyrannized over the persons, and pocketed the property of their adversaries.

S E C T. III.

WHAT a lamentable spectacle doth this present to us, of a religion so amiable as that of Jesus Christ, which even in its infancy could be so corrupted by the wiles and hypocrisy of those men, who were instituted to support it in its greatest purity—To what shall we attribute this misfortune? To a defect in religion! It

cannot be. For it shines forth in all that amiable simplicity, which destroys every wrong affliction, even of the hearts, much more than the lives and conduct of mankind—May we not attribute it, however, to another source? I wont say to the obstinacy in opinion of the advocates of religious truths, and to the interference of philosophic notions, where they were so little wanted. I will attribute it originally to a source, for which, perhaps, I may be blamed by a set of men, who still continue to avail themselves of an institution from which they have received so much benefit. I will endeavour to account for it then from the early establishment of a priesthood, that golden opportunity to a worldly minded man. And in order to do this more effectually, we must examine into the necessity, as well as the utility, of such an order, in those early times. And if we can shew that it was really useless, we may imagine it was exceedingly mischievous. That a number of men should be set apart as teachers of religion, instructed in every doctrine which belongs to it, and by which it is supported, is a great benefit to society. That they should be decently maintained too, at the public expence, is but just and reasonable at this time of day, because the variety of disputes which have hap-

happened in ecclesiastical affairs, and the distance in time from which religion was first promulgated, have made theology a laborious science, rather than a system of right actions only. But if polemical disputes had never happened in society, if the order of priesthood had never been established as distinct from the general mass of mankind, and if political authority had never intervened in the religious sentiments of the world; the order of priesthood might have been executed even at this time, christianity would have been better understood, its precepts more regularly observed, and its liberty more securely maintained.

In the first preaching of religion, all that was wanting to support it were industry, and a good conscience. Our Saviour himself knew this, and he selected, therefore, his disciples, not from the opulent or the learned, but he repaired to the cottage of the fisherman, and there he found that integrity of heart, and that labour and diligence, which he knew would be most necessary to the propagation of his gospel. In future times the rich and powerful, as well as the men of sense and knowledge, attracted by the charms of this divine person, approved of his doctrines so friendly to mankind, and eagerly embraced his religion. Nicodemus had a long and serious
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conference with him, by which he was convinced of the truth of his mission; and Joseph of Arimathea buried him in his own tomb, in which no other person had ever been lain. Much travelling and great expence were requisite for those apostles who succeeded our Saviour, to traverse the world, and to teach his doctrine to all nations. But he himself encouraged them to bear with patience, when he foretold, that they should undergo a variety of hardships in the world. If he had told them, that they should become bishops of certain rich and powerful cities, from which they should amass immense wealth, he might have encouraged their worldly expectations, but his gospel would have been but little benefited by their sublunary views. For in prosecuting the end, they would probably have lost sight of the means, by which they are to attain to it.

To continue a race of disinterested men, who should expend their whole fortunes in the prosecution of their duty, and live in the most abject poverty and meanness, was a very difficult task, and was soon prevented by the immunities which were bestowed upon the church. Immunities which were but light to the benefactors, but were very advantageous to those who received them. A church then soon became to avaricious persons

persons a valuable consideration, and others, who might not perhaps be so fond of money, were willing to avail themselves of these benefits, whilst a natural fortitude secured them from the dangers of persecution. By these means a priesthood was established, not of ignorant fishermen, who denied no emoluments, or of rich persons whose consciences secured them against the temptations of any; but of worldly minded men, who were desirous of making a gain of religion, as of any other earthly commodity. And it has proved to be the best trade the device of man was ever able to invent. Had none but poor conscientious fishermen, or of rich and powerful persons who were conscientious too, been left to propagate the gospel; the order of priesthood would have been useless, the doctrines of the gospel would never have stood in need of human learning, and it would naturally have insinuated itself into the minds of men, by its own purity and simplicity. That a church should be instituted, or a place where the disciples of christianity might meet and perform their devotions to the Almighty, no one will pretend to dispute. But when the doctrines of religion were so simple, an instructor was hardly necessary, and plain common sense, such as was consistent with every occupation, was alone necessary

necessary in the person who might occasionally preside in such an assembly. That any however should be set apart for this purpose, and liberally rewarded too, could be of no use, unless it were to increase their love of power, and their love of money. And this was the inevitable consequence.

A natural reason may be given, why christian ministers should be glad to avail themselves of the order of priesthood. It was because that it was formerly established, both in the heathen, as well as the Jewish church. And although Christ came to destroy the ceremonial law of the latter; and entirely obliterate idolatry amongst the former; yet his successors were unwilling to give up the emoluments of either, tho' it was very easy to change the objects to which their adoration might be paid, and excuse themselves from some painful operations.

In the first ages of christianity, the title of bishop implied no more than the pastor of a congregation, and notwithstanding it has been so highly exalted since, yet every person who was chosen to preside in a distinct assembly was honoured by it. His power, however, was no more than that of a spiritual teacher, and extended only to those few who submitted themselves to his care. In process of time as the disciples of christianity

tianity increased, and different congregations were established in large and populous towns ; the pastor of the first established church, retained the name of bishop, whilst the rest were excluded from it. A number of ministers too, whenever they met together, naturally gave the preheminance to the first in dignity amongst them, the bishop of the place where they assembled. Such meetings were natural, and entirely consistent with the true spirit of the gospel, which requires that unanimity of temper, and that friendship in society, which is necessary to support so laudable an institution. And if these meetings had only considered the real good and benefit of the community, what society could have been more amiable. But ambitious men no sooner found their power over the consciences of their weak brethren, than these meetings became subservient to schemes of oppression, which ended in frequent quarrels amongst themselves, and endeavours to overcome and reject each other. To what a plight may we suppose the innocent and honest man to be reduced.

These meetings were not long confined to particular cities. When ministers discovered how necessary they were to support their power and influence, whole provinces, nay, whole nations were called together,

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to determine the best means for establishing an unnatural authority. Bishops were convened with the rest, but the preheminance of the distinct dioceses was disputed with great acrimony, and thus a party raised against the community without doors, soon brought on great confusion amongst themselves, and introduced all the anathemas with which the minority in sentiment was tormented. This power the majority either in property, or in numbers, laboured hard to support, and when they found a prince who was able and willing to become their protector, readily submitted themselves to him, as a security against every danger. This was the origin of priesthood, and of that craft which was necessary to maintain it. How affairs have operated since, and how the authority of this order has been kept up in every nation which had been denominated christian, would be too tedious to detail. We will not therefore insist upon the variety of ways by which the church of Rome has exercised human power, to the injury of mankind. We will not enter upon all the schemes of oppression, that every protestant church has adopted since the reformation, or will not display every species of tyranny under the church of England establishment; no nor under that of the presbyterians,

byterians, and of every branch of dissenters. Persecution, and bigotry have lifted up their heads under every form of church government; both in those which by the laws of their country, are secured in their rights, and in those which have differed from legal establishment, but have reserved some privileges equally injurious to the community. To enter into a regular detail of all these evils, would be a very laborious task, and although it might be a very improving, yet at the same time, would be a very painful exhibition of the manners of the world. We will confine ourselves therefore, to the history of religion, in these kingdoms, and to the many inconveniences, which at present arise from a political establishment of it, in this land of liberty. And in the prosecution of this design, will appeal to the good sense of the community, to determine whether such an establishment, is not highly inconsistent with all our political, if not with all our religious notions.

S E C T. IV.

WE cannot be surprised to find that those nations who have sacrificed the liberty of action in the individual, without any compensation for it, but the sup-

port of the grandeur and vanity of an ambitious man, should resign their opinions also, or the profession of opinions, into the hands of a superior power. It was natural likewise, for a monarch, when he had tyrannized over the personal rights of his subjects, in the same manner to tyrannize over their consciences, and those ruling principles which it was possible for him to command, but never in his power to subdue. Such a religion as popery too is the best support of arbitrary measures to any ambitious potentate. For when men think freely, and give a scope to a general enquiry, they are naturally led to throw off those restraints which are so necessary in the support of power. And that abject spirit on the contrary, which is afraid of thinking for itself, becomes an easy prey to ambition. There is nothing in the world so absolute as the decrees of the church of Rome. The papal thunder has been the most powerful weapon that was ever wielded against the natural rights of mankind. And the subordinate government which has been established in it, has been excellently well calculated to support its power. Attracted by the charms of superstition, and those objects which give a kind of lustre to a religion, solemn music, brilliant paintings, and superb processions, mankind have been led

to submit to the most despicable slavery, whilst they gratified their curiosity, and made a sacrifice to vanity of their virtue. Whilst they were pleased with the means which seemed intended to excite their devotion, they lost sight of the end designed by these solemnities, to enslave their consciences, and enforce the narrow views of a set of bigotted churchmen. To these things were likewise added the most powerful energy of terror and despair, which were always hung out in their most frightful aspects, to awaken the distress, and engage the attention of an admiring and bewildered multitude. The common people however were not the only persons who were influenced by these striking objects. The most powerful princes were either silly enough to believe and trust to the superior power of the church of Rome, or were willing to satisfy their ambition, whilst they sheltered themselves under its wing. They availed themselves however of this advantage, the establishment of a most arbitrary sway over the actions of their subjects, as they were warranted by their religion to effect it over the consciences of them. A reformation then in the principles of religion, and in consequence an alienation from the church of Rome, required the utmost degree of attention, when it roused the
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the spirit of those who were tired of its shackles. The reformers began to think for themselves, and throw off every restraint upon their opinions, religious as well as civil. A power of subordination was therefore generally destroyed both in government, and in religion. And mankind emerging from barbarity, were willing to shake off every yoke under which they laboured. In England however it fared otherwise. For our clergy, at the same time they destroyed the pernicious doctrines of the church of Rome, thought that they might keep many of its emoluments, which custom and authority rendered necessary, as well as convenient. They did not desire to relinquish every power over the church, when they destroyed that of the pope. They threw off only some of the religious observances, but they kept many others equally as ridiculous, and as inconsistent with the intentions of the gospel. This can be accounted for only in this manner, that the beginning of the reformation in England, was attempted by the bishops, who were unwilling to yield the advantages of which they had experienced so much of the sweets; and that it was effected by an arbitrary and imperious queen, who found an order of priesthood, and a subordinate authority in religion, would be highly essential to her tyrannical measures,

measures, and would be of the last importance to support her against the opposition of her subjects. It so happened however, that even the reformation which was first levelled against the power of the church of Rome, was established upon the same general plan of government in England, as that church had adopted. It may seem at first sight too very strange, that the religious and political principles of our great men, influenced each other no more than they really did at the time of the revolution, that glorious æra in the annals of Great-Britain. And that when liberty of action was established upon the safest and most firm foundation, liberty of opinion was not supported with the same degree of vigour.

During the great struggles for liberty under our civil wars, church government was in some measure destroyed, or rather the form of it was altered. But even in those times, that true spirit of enquiry, which is the real support of a religion, and that inability of the magistrate to become its defender, was never thought of. As monarchy was destroyed, episcopal authority, which was its greatest support, fell with it, and they were both buried in one mass of ruins together. As the republican constitution prevailed, the Presbyterian form of church

church government lifted up its head along with it. And when king Charles was restored to these kingdoms, the bishops were restored to their sees, and the same kind of government as formerly took place. There is a considerable difference however between the political and religious government of these nations, as there is a difference between a democracy in the state, and presbyters in the church, under a republican constitution. In our system there is some resemblance indeed in the forms, but a very great difference in the power by which they are supported. In one case, the monarch is limited and confined in his actions; in the other, he is subject to little controul, but to delegate a power to particular persons, who are more absolute than he would chuse to be himself.

We shall defer however, any other remarks on this subject, till we have examined a little more particularly into the nature of our church, and shewn that even as a scheme of government, if any were permitted, it would be highly oppressive to the subject, and entirely inconsistent with the constitutional principles of this kingdom. We shall consider it then in three points of view. First, as an establishment of a subordinate power, by bishops, &c. &c. who are protected by ecclesiastical laws. Secondly,

ly, as requiring a subscription to a set of articles, which it is impossible that all, and very probable but few, can with safe consciences believe; and Thirdly, as affixing peculiar restraints upon the subject, and punishing him for no crime.

S E C T. V.

THE institution of bishops, and of that authority dependant upon it, derives its power, if not its original source, from that appeal to the Emperor, which we mentioned before, and became an useful appendage to arbitrary sway. It was afterwards indeed, separated from the temporal prince, and became subject to a spiritual one. But this was no more than changing hands, and whilst it diversified the objects of authority, made the power over the consciences of men more arbitrary and tyrannical, as it was more extensive and compleat. The separation of our king Henry VIII. from the church of Rome, likewise was a scheme of independance to himself, but by no means intended to favour the people; and the reformation which succeeded it, though it gave a scope to free enquiry, and enlarged the minds of those who embraced it, yet by no means altered the form of church governments, or remitted the controul of a priesthood over the opinions of their fellow-creatures. Under the same restraints, and with little variety, religion

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has continued ever since. Perhaps the authority in the prince, and in the clergy, have not been exercised with that vigour, which they might have shewn. The times are more free than in the time of the Tudors, and the clergy less in repute. But notwithstanding this, an aspiring and at the same time a bigotted prince, may by means of his private authority, make every dissenter from the church of England, tremble for his life.

It may be said, that there is a very considerable resemblance between the power of the king of England, in church and in state affairs; and that as a free common-wealth is preserved in one respect, as in the other. That the same form is preserved we will allow. That there is an upper and lower house of convocation, cannot be denied. But does the king want his houses of convocation, as he does his parliament? By no means. And would not his private authority, by suspending his privilege of appointing bishops, destroy the whole order of priesthood at once, without injuring himself or the nation. But he cannot act thus with his parliament; the security of his debts, and his revenue. The king as executioner of the law, has a power of putting in force every act of the state, and religion depends upon the state for its being; in his house of convocation therefore, he can do nothing but what is warranted by that superior power, which can support or annul

annul any religion they please. And this is evident from the present establishment of it. The power of the clergy therefore is very different from that of the parliament of Great-Britain, and is to be considered as a branch of the executive, rather than of the legislative part of our constitution. The clergy more nearly resemble the army, than the parliament; and as they are governed by laws equally contrary, have a very powerful influence in enforcing edicts, to the prejudice of their fellow creatures, but none in enacting of them. This may seem rather a happy than a disagreeable circumstance, when considered in one point of sight. As a freedom from the tyranny of a set of men, who being little interested in any one's good but their own, might make laws more prejudicial to the interest of the community, than what are already established. But as the terror of a law, consists in the execution of it; if tyranny is to be found there, it may be much worse than the legislation, though ever so severe. For in one case there is hopes of relief, but never in the other; especially where a subordinate authority is regularly established. For every one willing to supplant his superior, will exert his zeal to the utmost in a cause which may gain him preferment, and keep a strict and observant eye over the person above him; who from such a circumspexion will be obliged to act like his neighbour. Besides the hopes of preferment,

ment, naturally beget an attention to those persons who are to bestow it; the flattering of their foibles, and a familiarity in manners. If a benefactor is therefore severe, hard hearted and cruel, all who expect rewards from him, will easily slide into this disposition, and practice every art which may recommend them to his favour. We need not mention other vices, equally as inconsistent with the christian dispensation. What we want to shew, is not how they may be made bad men, but how they may be made tyrannical, and disposed to overrule the natural, the private rights of mankind.

Tyranny may be expected likewise, in such a church as ours, not only from a subordination in power, but likewise from the unnatural authority which has been assumed over men, and from deriving all law from the most arbitrary source. Civil or ecclesiastical law, is the law of the Roman emperors, built upon the ruins of the most eminent common-wealth which ever flourished. It is the law of every arbitrary prince in Europe, and of the supreme head in the church of Rome. It is by such a law however, that our clergy preserve their power, and determine the causes of many of their fellow-subjects, in causes which respect their property and their persons. How unnatural a paradox doth this present to us in the system of our government. That the freest nation upon the earth, whose liberty

erty is their darling treasure, and who would venture every thing to secure this blessing, should not only countenance an unjustifiable right over the consciences of men, but should enforce it by officers the most oppressive, and by laws inconsistent with the constitution of their country, and destructive of the freedom of mankind. To every one who is in the least acquainted with the world as it now stands, or is at all conversant with the history of these nations, the civil, as well as the ecclesiastical history of them, it will appear, that what we have represented in theory, is absolutely true in fact. Has there ever been a disturbance in government, in which the clergy have not interfered? And has not their subordinate authority given them great weight in it? Nay, has it not taken care always to suppress that general liberty in religion which has been admitted in civil affairs?

A bishop, as a spiritual lord, has an equal power with any peer in the supreme assembly of these realms; and thus, indeed, constitutes a part of the legislative authority, but he is absolutely dependent upon the crown. It would be inconsistent, however, to think that he should relinquish his seat of himself, and administration know the value of it too well to suffer him to do it. And hence his preeminence is admitted in religious business, whilst his vote is secured in that which is merely

merely secular. And thus it has happened, that rather than lose the voice of twenty-six persons, the whole scheme of ecclesiastical policy has been supported in its fullest extent. Had it not been for this circumstance, King William would no doubt have as easily inclined to the destruction of the bishops, and of every power connected with them, as he did to the toleration act, of which he was so firm a friend. That glorious revolution, which he effected in these kingdoms, had this flaw in it; that whilst it secured so safely our civil, it absolutely neglected our religious privileges. From the King, indeed, ever willing to support his prerogative, a revolution which derogated from his power could not be expected, though, as a friend to human liberty, he might have consented to it, as a term by which he was to ascend the throne. He might imagine the clergy, as all sensible, though not all benevolent princes do, an useful instrument to effect any purpose he should require of them. The nobility, who were the sole agents in that important event, were unwilling likewise to offend a set of men, who might be useful to them in the enterprize; and besides, many of the bishops were concerned with them; nay, Burnet was a principal, as well as an useful and very active assertor of the cause. How he would have chosen to resign his emoluments is uncertain, but it would have

have been dangerous to have questioned him upon such a topic. Religion then was not considered at the revolution, and the king though really a friend to liberty of conscience, found it necessary through his whole reign to protect church government, although he obtained that memorable act, which admitted some conscientious persons to dissent from it.

Since the time of the revolution no reformation has taken place, and indeed what opportunity has been given for it. The clergy are still obliged to support their power, and great emoluments are annexed to it. The dissenters in comparison are few and scattered, and confined to a class of people of little importance in the ruling part of the nation, whatever they may be in the wealthy parts of it. Those of the clergy too, who are conscientious, or where consciences are not obscured in the glare of worldly preferments, are likewise very few. To be obliged to relinquish great livings, deaneries and bishops, those great benefices which all enjoy, or aim at enjoying, would be considered by the greatest part as a robbery, and the most unjust persecution. One of the worst of crimes with them, is in some thinking quakers to refuse the payment of tithes. But what would be the fault then of withholding all worldly preferment, but what was derived from merit, or what is now too often bestowed upon indolence and immorality.

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S E C T. VI.

WE proceed to enquire into the imposition of thirty-nine articles in the church of England, upon those who become ministers, and of consequence upon those who attend the services of religion, or conform to any ordinances connected with them. If conscience ought to preside as a ruling principle, in the breast of any man, it should shine forth in its fullest lustre in those who pretend to teach the dictates of it to others, and whose sole business is to inform mankind of the truths. But how can truth be properly explained by those persons who sign their names to error. For they certainly subscribe to error, whether they believe the doctrines to which they annex their honour, or not. We need not dispute the fallacy, where they do not believe them, for there the hypocrisy is too apparent. But if they do really believe them, they are not certain how long that belief will continue, provided that they read and properly inform their minds: And if they do not this they are highly culpable. For the books which are most likely to inform them of their errors, if they have any, are the scriptures of the truth, which should be ever in their hands. There is nothing so unnatural, and of consequence so arbitrary, as a subscription to particular articles in religion. It is the bane of truth,
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and can answer no good end, but to enforce that general authority, which may be necessary to form a government in religion. It hath been thought expedient upon some political occasions, when the person of the prince, or the constitution of the realm has been endangered, to require of all suspicious persons oaths, which might secure their fidelity to him, and the government by which they are supported. It would seem however, exceedingly ridiculous, if certain external qualities of person with which no one could be acquainted, or of certain abilities of mind, of which every one might doubt, should have a pænegyric affixed, to which oaths were made cognizable. It is the same thing with regard to the religion of Jesus Christ, in whatever country it is established. Every one who is a preacher of his doctrine, should believe his existence, the glorious ends he came into the world to promote, and the motives upon which he enforced them. But further than these no man can be obliged to believe, by any human authority, especially when men who are the sincerest disciples of Christ, have differed so much in their decisions.

If religion was merely a scheme of human policy, contrived and enacted to support what we may justly imagine its worst effects, the establishment of human power; I cannot think, that a rigid attention to particular articles, would be the best means

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of securing it, unless knavery and hypocrisy were equally necessary to support the plan : For it must preclude education, and that useful learning, which is of the greatest consequence in undertakings of this kind. If people read, they must think. Can any thing then be so terrible as to be prevented both from reading and thinking, for fear of losing those worldly emoluments, which can only be secured by ignorance, or by craft. By ignorance in trusting to leaders more wise than ourselves, and by craft in those superior genius's, who are the real support of church power. No worldly scheme can be supported by ignorance alone. It is necessary however, to prevent the generalities of the clergy, especially the inferior clergy, from being too wise, to prevent any attempts towards a reformation. And many of those who receive great benefits from the church, are obliged to comply with many irksome things, and great strains upon their consciences, to excuse them. To reason freely under the restraints of an establishment, is impossible, unless the circumstances we mentioned last are attended to, and the effects of reason are restrained in one set of men, and prevented in the other.

Upon these accounts, we find very few of the clergy who are properly instructed in the principles of true religion, and many who are ignorant of the force and meaning of the articles to which they subscribe: And
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who, if they do understand them, are unwilling to examine them by the test of their own reason and of scripture, or if they have examined them by these tests, are afraid to propagate their real opinions, unless where they absolutely agree with their subscriptions. To confirm this, let me ask who have been the great supporters of religion against infidelity in this kingdom, and the most able advocates for truth in theological opinions? Who have canvassed the scripture with greater accuracy, and given the best interpretations of it? Who have most promoted, and established the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ, upon the plan he taught it? The clergy of the church of England, or the laity who have studied these matters with freedom; or of late years those few dissenting ministers, who freed from the shackles of an establishment, and supported by the lenity of a mild administration, have discussed every important point in religion, with that true spirit which was required from the first in its professors. To Tillotson, to South, to Sherlock, to Clark, Butler and Hoadly, all great names indeed under the establishment, many of whom, however, were not ashamed to confess their objections to it; we may oppose the very great names of Locke, of Sir Isaac Newton, of Mr. Boyle, of Milton, of Addison, of Steele, and Sir Michael Foster, who were all well skilled in theology, and philosophy, and

shewed their good sense, not only in embracing christianity, but in defending it upon the most rational foundation. Amongst dissenting ministers, we may mention Leland, Chandler, Grove, Foster, Taylor, Lardner, and many others, all great names, which will for ever shine forth, as ornaments of literature, in the annals of their country, and dignify the religion of Christ Jesus, by the services they have done to it.

We have not mentioned all the great men in the church, who have bestowed much pains in elucidating the difficulties by which true religion has been obscured; for religion in itself is easy to be understood by every capacity. We confess, that many have laboured in the service of their master, notwithstanding the restraints which have been put upon them. But this every rational man will acknowledge, nay, the clergy themselves are willing to acknowledge, that in many topics a free enquiry has been absolutely prohibited, and in others, more pains has been taken to screen obnoxious opinions from censure, than to deliver the truth with openness, and with candour. What a loss has it been to the world, that such men as Tillotson, as Whichcot, as Bull, and bishop Taylor, and several others, men of ingenuity, and true friends to free enquiry, should be prevented from exercising their able talents, in a cause where they would have

have shone with such exalted lustre. Dr. Clark, indeed, as he soared above most men in his abilities, soared above his fellows in resolution and integrity; he ventured to assert the cause of truth against the power of the hierarchy, and against all the ill will and malice of his enemies. He was followed indeed by a few, but church censures were employed so severely and liberally against them, as to terrify many well meaning persons from prosecuting the glorious work which he had begun with so much success. If every topic in religion had been handled with that accuracy and precision, and with that temper and good sense, with which he handled the doctrine of the trinity, we should probably have had no establishment at this time, or such an one as few would have refused to assent to, at least none but those who dislike all establishment, even those which are settled upon the broadest foundation.

We shall advance but one argument more, however, upon this subject, and leave the rest to the worthy and spirited author of the Confessional, a firm and steady, as well as able champion in the cause; who has seen with concern the ambitious strides of the clergy, and has endeavoured to break down the chain by which they are supported. Unhappy has it been for this kingdom, that so much luxury and dissipation hath unavoidably crept into it,
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as to prevent in our rulers all attention to the concerns of religion, and encouraged the defenders of priestcraft to persevere in their resolutions to maintain its rights inviolable. Strange and unaccountable it is indeed, that when the cry of liberty is advanced to its highest pitch, and when the least restraint upon our actions, even upon those which are injurious to the community, are deemed tyrannical and oppressive, that the liberty of thinking in religious matters is so little encouraged; nay that the violent advocates for political freedom are members of the church of England. And what is worse than all, that the chief advocate in the cause, should at the same time avow his contempts of an administration, for infringing upon the liberty of his private, his single person, in an affair of no consequence, and profess to belong to a church which has infringed the liberty of every man in the kingdom, in an affair of infinite consequence; and by which he was particularly affected, as being educated in contrary principles.

The argument we proceed to mention, as of such consequence in every religious constitution, and which is directly opposed to a subscription of articles, is the growth of infidelity. The advocates of this noxious principle have chiefly levelled all their force against the power of the clergy as a party, and against the mysterious notions which almost all churches have adopted in
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their peculiar articles. For can any man of superior understanding to his fellow mortals, see without abhorrence the means which are employed to support one set of men against the rest, who shall prescribe opinions for them, oblige them to the belief of them, and be handsomely rewarded for their imposition? This abhorrence naturally begets an aversion to the first principles of religion, because no way is pointed out by which it may be studied in a rational and intelligent manner, and independent of those shackles with which it is incumbered. Every man though he may be willing to think for himself, in an affair in which his interest is so much concerned, yet may not be willing to encounter all the difficulties, and to remove all the briars and thorns with which the path of truth is overgrown: He likes to tread upon smooth and even ground, and wishes the laborious part by which it is made so, were executed by some other person. If this is not done however, he is apt to turn his feet aside, and go that way which is better cleared and more easy to his conception. Some have imagined that infidelity flatters our understandings, but from whence doth this supposition arise; is it not, because in a religion which is tied down by certain invariable rules, and those not the most intelligible, no scope is given to the exercise of our rational faculties? Hence there is no cure for infidelity, so certain as a rational religion,

religion, founded on the nature and the truth of things; and such a religion is christianity, as exhibited in the gospel: It presents to us the most simple truths, such as reason, if there were no such religion, might suggest, though not secure to mankind. When it becomes a security therefore to the best lights of our understanding, it shines forth in its most amiable colours, and readily meets with our approbation: But when it is obscured and corrupted by human, not divine knowledge, with interpretations which imagination only can invent, and with mysteries incongruous with the first principles of reason, it excludes the rational part of mankind from embracing it; and when it is discovered that such mysterious interpretations are thrown out only as baits to delude the unwary and inattentive, and to triumph over their consciences, it excludes the honest too; and none are left to support it, but those whose reason is so debased as to become the mistress of these devices. All establishments therefore, founded upon particular articles, are subservient to a priesthood: For what can they subserve besides! And as such are a species of that unnatural authority, which is inconsistent with scripture, which is incompatible with just reasoning, upon the laws of nature, and which especially is contradictory to the true spirit of the English constitution.

S E C T.

S E C T. VII.

BUT we have in our religion restraints of much greater consequence, than what have been mentioned, restraints indeed which are exercised in their fullest extent in the church of Rome, from which they are derived, and which most protestant countries have in some measure adopted. But notwithstanding this they will always be a scandal to human nature, and are peculiarly injurious to the British subject. I mean what are made by those unwarrantable acts of parliament, which have affixed the severest penalties on the inhabitants of these kingdoms, for their honesty and integrity, whilst rewards are liberally bestowed upon insincerity and upon hypocrisy. Amongst these may not only be included acts which have been passed merely for these purposes, but others which may not appear at first sight so rigorous and oppressive. I mean the test act, and I mean the toleration act: For the one excludes a number of men from their just rights, merely because they are the most deserving of them; and the other constitutes an establishment upon rather a broader foundation indeed than the original, but equally rigorous to those without its pale, and entirely negligent of those within it.

In every well constituted form of government, a propriety is studied in the offices
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which are allotted to the several ranks of people, and their different abilities for service. To support the arbitrary monarch in that power which he has unjustifiably extorted from his subjects, it will be necessary for him to reward with his munificence many of his immediate servants, who become by that means a perpetual guard to him, against the clamour and the force of the multitude, who are suffered to provide for themselves. In a country where no such government prevails, and where the king reigns solely in the affections of his people, he wants no guard but such as will defend him from the private censures, as well as from the public clamours of his subjects, viz. the uprightness of his own heart. An equality therefore of power in every man who is fit to enjoy it, and the admitting every able and honest citizen to posts of honour and of profit, whatever his circumstances, his family, or his private opinions may be, are certainly necessary, in order to be served with integrity. But in a land where government is solely constituted for the benefit of a community, whatever its form may be, the capacity of enjoying such offices, is the birth-right of every inhabitant of it. To make laws therefore, to exclude any person from these privileges, so far as they are privileges, upon account of any circumstances which do not incapacitate him from doing his duty; is exerting an injurious authority, which no
free

free constitution can warrant. The natural circumstances which may exclude from all offices whatsoever, are imbecillities of mind and body, and a vicious conduct in which no trust can be reposed. What may exclude from some only may be poverty and want of right education. Every person however who is not distinguished by these defects, is qualified, and of consequence entitled to any office, whenever it shall be offered to him, or the prevalence of his friends shall be able to procure it for him. How injurious then must it appear to the subjects of any government, and how unjustifiable in a country which pretends to christianity, to exclude from any office, upon account of opinions only, and especially upon account of religious opinions, where the founder of our faith has discouraged the power of any temporal government, whose censures are not of this world, and who has ordered us *to obey only one master, that is Christ.*

But supposing that upon principles of prudence, it be thought necessary to exclude some persons from offices of trust, merely upon account of their peculiar sentiments; the first question would be what opinions are the objects of such a punishment. If they are such as have a tendency to destroy the foundation of moral conduct, to introduce vice and profaneness, and invalidate the authority of human government, the state will naturally take

care not to admit the advocates for them, to the injury of the community: If too they are likely to cause a disbelief of a God who has created, and presides over this world, or of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which was preached to mankind, to oblige them to fulfill all the social and relative duties of life; the prudence of every government will avoid the persons who enjoy them, and exclude them from those offices which are incongruous to their character. Thus the preacher of the gospel should believe the general truths of it, and those who are trusted with places of great moment, should have that true spirit of patriotism, and of honour, which is necessary to support the dignity of the commonwealth. But to fill many posts, and these the most numerous, it is of little consequence what the character, or what the opinions of those who hold them may be, otherwise than that persons who have upright sentiments of heart, will know best how to fill every station with propriety. A knowledge of such persons however, is never to be obtained by a religious institution.

Let us now enquire then what are the religious opinions which are made the test, by which every office almost is to be held in this country, and what are the offices to be qualified by it. True religion supposes the belief of God, and of Jesus Christ, and of consequence every thing that
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is revealed by them, and which is not in-
 consonant to their nature. Every religi-
 ous opinion therefore which should be-
 come a test of a religious man, and of con-
 sequence qualified for a post of trust, should
 be comprised in this simple question. Do
 you believe in the new testament? But is
 this the creed of the church of England?
 To which a tacit consent is required in all
 who religiously receive the sacrament in it.
 Are not most of the articles of that church
 derived from Athanasius, and other unin-
 spired writers, rather than from scripture!
 Suppose however such a test as we men-
 tioned be requisite to discover the religion
 of any member of society; who are the
 persons, let me ask, in whose religion go-
 vernment is so immediately interested? Is
 it in the first officers of state, who are often
 obliged to sacrifice their moral as well as
 religious sentiments, to their own interest
 and security? Is it in the members of the
 legislature, who if they are truly honest
 men, will disclaim all authority in religi-
 ous matters, and as connected with the wel-
 fare of so large a community, will have
 sufficient ties to subserve the interest of their
 country, without being obliged to a con-
 fession of their faith in religion? Is it in
 the officers of the revenue, whose attach-
 ment to their places is the best security of
 their integrity? Is it in magistrates whose
 conduct is cognizable before their peers?
 Is it in officers of the army, or navy, who
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are more influenced by the terrors of a court martial? Or in fine, is it in any one man in the kingdom, when the laws are so constituted as to have a proper guard over every species of fraud and dishonesty. The good effects of the christian religion, are derived from its moral tendency, in making every man wiser and better than he otherwise would have been. This extends to law-givers, as well as the subjects of the law; but it was never intended to be an instrument in the execution of the laws; it belongs to every man in his private, not in his public capacity: But as it makes him good in his private character, it will naturally influence his public one likewise; it will make him a better legislator, a better magistrate, and a better citizen in every respect.

Having seen then that it is of no importance to government to demand a security of religion from officers, whilst the laws are established upon its principles, we shall now endeavour to shew, that the test which has been appointed, is injurious to the consciences of many worthy persons, and therefore destructive of the good effects it might be designed to promote. To have every officer in a government as honest as possible, is certainly a great advantage. But by this test the most worthy are excluded from every post: For I shall always esteem the conscientious man as more worthy than one who pays no regard to a principle of
such

such importance: And on the contrary men of abandoned characters are most commonly admitted: For in the first place, they are rendered by a vicious conduct more destitute, and therefore require posts of profit to support them; and secondly they are easily swayed by their interest to give up every religious principle, when put in contrast with their worldly advantages; and thus they swallow the bait with greediness. What a loss is this to society! That so many worthy men should be incapacitated from serving their country, and that the most abandoned should be advanced to the greatest privileges in it. I will say no more however upon this subject. It may be inferred I hope from what I have shewn, that no government has a right to ordain such a test, that it is an infringement of our natural liberties, a high degree of punishment for no crime, and incompatible with the interests of the state. That we shall ever see it removed however is a doubt, not because government is so corrupt as to stand in need of it; but because it is a very powerful instrument in the hands of the hierarchy, to secure the unnatural authority they have assumed.

S E C T. VIII.

MANY more instances might be adduced of the means by which the clergy are supported in their power. We might

might enter upon them all, and shew how far presentation, tithes, modus's &c. are productive of the same end, productive of it by contributing to the vices of their patrons, and securing to themselves a variety of benefices. We will not however represent to our readers the little learning, the bad lives, and the great pride of our modern clergy. Every inhabitant almost of this kingdom, whether in crowded cities, or in the sequestered village, will often find, and will feel to his cost the truth of the accusation: And can it be expected to be otherwise, whilst such an establishment is protected. A clergyman enters upon his profession, not as a spiritual, but as a temporal undertaking, and he employs the whole of his abilities to this exalted purpose, the aggrandizing a large fortune. If good sense, a deal of learning, and great application were the only things necessary to obtain a living, and secure it afterwards, no doubt but he would cultivate his mind as a person of any other profession: But as lively wit, agreeable conversation, and other sociable accomplishments, are of more consequence to ingratiate him into the hearts of his patrons, these are the objects of his study, and these he most eagerly embraces as a qualification for the most serious character upon earth: That there are men of learning amongst the clergy, of real learning too, no one will deny who has ever seen our universities. But this I believe

believe is more often derived from opportunity and natural abilities, than from ambition, or a regard to their profession; where indeed a natural reserve, or the habit of a college, secludes a person from the society of the world; and where no rich patron appears, to associate him in his follies, and immediately to reward him for compliances with his humour, a clergyman may cultivate his mind for want of something else to do; and this cultivation may raise him in time to the highest offices in the church. But by slow and persevering steps he arrives at that degree of pre-eminence, with which his imagination had never flattered him, till he was entered the threshold; and to which many a dunce of quality has arrived before him without any merit, but that for which he is now esteemed, though he doth not see it, a subserviency to the private interest of a minister.

If we take a review of men of literature amongst the clergy, both of those in exalted stations, and those in the most obscure retirement; we shall find the source of their great learning to arise from what we mentioned. It is sufficient to say ambition can never be the cause, for by this talent alone, it is never satisfied; and whilst they are confined to a set of articles, a love of truth cannot be the cause, for an ingenuous mind would rather continue in its
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ignorance, than be satisfied at the expence of its integrity.

Upon the whole then it will appear, to every thinking, if not to every humane mind, that by the present state of religion, the greatest restrictions are laid upon the clergy, and the utmost authority exercised over the laity of these kingdoms. Whether a reformation however is a feasible scheme at this time, and under the present disposition of the people, will admit of a doubt with some persons. But if such an infringement of our liberties is really wrong, what necessity is there for a delay? Some very worthy people, and men of distinguished sense, both amongst the clergy and dissenters, have of late exercised their talents in a good cause, when they have favoured the scheme of a revolution. There is an apparent difference however in the intentions of each: The clergy wish the subscriptions taken off, as a load, which as friends to free enquiry, they can no longer support. The dissenters want only a general toleration, that they may enjoy their present liberty under parliamentary authority, rather than under the lenity of a changeable administration. There is no doubt however but that they would rejoice to see every fetter removed, and the human mind expanding itself in all the freedom to which it naturally pleads a right. There is no fear indeed, whilst the present family sits upon the throne, and whilst they adhere to
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the principles upon which they were installed in it, of any oppression to the dissenters. They know very well the use such people are to government, and the loyalty of their dispositions. The party however is dwindling both in numbers, and in property, and if something is not done with regard to religious affairs, a general uniformity will very soon take place. The only kinds of support to the dissenters are very irrational, the abuse of merit, and the progress of methodism, which seems at present in a very growing state; but how long it will survive its leaders is uncertain: Our nobility are reduced to a level with other citizens, and tradesmen are at present enabled to support an equal expence with them; they are obliged therefore to solicit court favours, by which they may avail themselves of the benefits of the church, and deprive concealed merit of its proper due. This will evidently tend at least to secularize the bishoprics, and it has already tended to breed ill-will and discontent in the inferior clergy. This will afford likewise some hopes of a reformation in religion; it will afford some hopes, but yet there is a strong party to contend against; there are all the clergy who enjoy the power, and there are all the clergy who have literal merit only, and expect to enjoy it. Some bold stroke is therefore necessary to be struck, which will break down at once the barriers by which the hierarchy is supported, and re-

store christianity to its pristine, to its pure and uncorrupted state. We will not pretend to direct the means by which this may be done, though infinitely simple, we leave it to superior authority; we will only endeavour to point out the persons who are to do it, and shew the little inconvenience, nay the great advantage which will result from such a revolution. The church has been a word received amongst the populace with great veneration, and has been able to raise millions in its defence. It has been received amongst them however, like many other big-sounding words without any meaning, and to which they have not affixed the least idea. Had the word clergy been adopted instead of the church, I fancy it would not have been so much respected: For whatever regard the English people have paid to the word church, or to a venerable building which they respect more for its antiquity than its use, the clergy have never been much esteemed amongst them, especially when they borrow their ideas from a knowledge of their particular parish priests: If too in the destruction of the church of which the people were so much afraid, it had been told them, they were to pay no tithes, that they were to be married, their children christened, and their friends interred without a fee, or with such as they choose voluntarily to give; if it had been told them too, it was to prevent ministers from tyrannizing over their consciences,

sciences, and that advice was the whole to which they were to be beholden to them; it would have had a very different influence over their minds, and our countrymen though ever so fickle, would have begun to think a little, and have registered the evil effects of such a cry upon them.

Such a cry may perhaps be raised again, and it may be raised against me, for what I attempt in this essay. But yet I am not ashamed to avow, that it would be the greatest happiness of my life, if I could contribute by any laudable means to the destruction of the church of England, and enable every member of this valuable community to enjoy his just and lawful privileges, and study religion in that manner which appeared best to his own understanding. I would gladly ask too what would be the consequence of such a revolution! Would the people be less religious than they are at present? Would the priests be less wise, or less intelligent? They might not indeed be quite so rich. That the people however would be more religious, is evident I think from this consideration, that they would be influenced more by reason, than by prejudice; and every man let him be ever so poor, has good sense enough to distinguish what offers voluntarily to his conviction, from what is enforced by human authority, in aid of what is spiritual. To evince the truth of this we may observe that very few poor people in the church of
England,

England, pay any respect to its ordinances. Whereas the contrary may be observed with regard to the poor amongst the dissenters, who in general are not only more regular in their attendance on divine worship, but are sober in their families, and industrious in their occupations. The clergy too would not only be more learned but more decent in their conduct: Freed from the restraint of a number of very arbitrary articles, they would study religion with the same freedom and liberality of sentiment, as any branch of philosophy; they would enquire into the corruptions which have crept into the church, and endeavour to restore it to its genuine, to its original simplicity. The people too being set over them, as the censurers of their conduct, and their compositions, they would lead such decent, sober, and religious lives, as became their sacred, their serious character, and would study to compose and deliver with propriety their own lucubrations to the public.

But methinks I hear some bigotted devotee to church power, and to all its ceremonies advance and say " what shall every
 " man be left to his own devices, to chuse
 " his religion for himself, without any re-
 " straint upon his conscience, and with no
 " one to inspect into his conduct? Alas, we
 " might as well be given up to beasts of prey,
 " we are not safe even in our dwellings! Our
 " religion is the grand security, not only of
 " its truths, but of our lives and properties."

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I would ask however such a person in his turn, what real security there is, in a political establishment of religion, of these things. Churches, especially country churches, are generally very poorly filled. The common people soon begin to despise their minister, when he offers himself to them as their oppressor, rather than their pastor, and their teacher, and to shew their contempt they neglect any attendance upon him, although they are obliged to pay him for his service. The large congregations of methodists too in great towns, is a certain proof of what we assert. Their tabernacles are frequently as full as the neighbouring churches are empty. Christianity had no establishment for near four centuries, nay it was preached throughout the world under no protection, and propagated itself in many places against the religion which before had been legally settled. What fear is there then that its doctrines should be lost, or morality should cease where it was preached under the sanction, but not enforced by the authority of a civil magistrate? Every crime almost that is cognizable by a religious authority, is cognizable likewise by the civil. There is no fear of danger then from persons of no religion, whilst the fear of punishment continues the same in mankind. It may be said that there is no country which has received the christian religion, but what has received it under the restrictions of a peculiar establishment. This however is
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no proof of the expediency of such an institution, any more than the church of Rome was necessary before the reformation, because every country had received christianity under that or a similar form. If it were proper for a private monarch to become head over the church in his own kingdom, when every other was governed by a spiritual jurisdiction ; it may be just as proper for a temporal prince to resign all his religious authority to the people from whom he derived it. Every establishment therefore, in whatever country it is settled, is unjust, and every government by supporting it, is guilty of an act of oppression. We hope we have shewn how it is peculiarly injurious under the British constitution, and it is to be hoped therefore that the time will come, when it will be found necessary to relinquish every right of this kind, and restore the gospel of Jesus to these realms.

C O N C L U S I O N.

LET me then with all the respect which is due to a powerful as well as good prince, but with as much confidence as is natural to a British subject, call upon the first magistrate in this kingdom, to relinquish that right which has devolved to him from his ancestors, but of which as a religious man he can no longer avail himself. Let me call upon both houses of parliament,

liament, the representatives of our wants, and the security of our properties, to rescind those acts by which an unnatural authority has been usurped over the consciences of men, and restore the professors of religion to all the freedom which is allowed them by its author : Let me call upon the venerable bench of bishops, and every subordinate power under them, to search the scriptures and see upon what grounds their authority is supported, and as disciples of Jesus, to yield to their fellow creatures, whatever is derived from human and not from divine original. Let me call upon our universities, to lay aside subscriptions, which can have no influence over young and unformed minds, but to destroy the first principles of truth, and of sincerity. Let me call upon the inferior clergy who are deprived of their necessary subsistence, and yet are bound to articles, contradictory to their consciences, to assert the spirit of free enquiry ; and a just participation of their lawful dues. Let me call upon every dissenter to remonstrate against the oppression levelled against him in the test act, and the restrictions by which he is unjustly punished ; for no man is bound willingly to submit himself to a penalty, where he is conscious of committing no crime. In fine let me call upon every man who is an inhabitant of these realms, to study the scripture of truth, and to pay no greater respect to worldly authority, than what is war-

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ranted by them: let me call upon him particularly to read the precepts, and to observe the character of our divine master; and if in nothing which he has said, he can observe the traces of the establishment of a clergy, the power of a bishop and church censures, let me call upon him to disclaim this unnatural authority, and endeavour, as much as possible, to effect a revolution, which may free him from these shackles, restore the cause of reason to his mind, set his conscience at liberty from oppression, and justify the rights of the author of his religion.

I may, perhaps, in this disquisition, have spoken a little too boldly. I hope, however, I have not departed from the character, which, as an advocate for true religion, I ought to have supported. If I have endeavoured to destroy the force of bigotry, and that unnatural authority which was invented to support it; I hope I have not shewn too much of that spirit which I have decried, and defeated, by that means, the end which I was desirous to produce. Warmth and eagerness, I confess, are but poor advocates in any cause. Truth stands in no need of them. If, however, in the cause of truth, a subject of so much consequence to the world, by too earnest a love for it, I have been betrayed into an improper emotion, I hope the candid reader will excuse it, for the uncandid are no objects of terror to me. And at the same time,

time, I hope that he will reflect how dangerous such an earnestness would have been, if I had taken the other side of the argument, and if my reasonings had been supported by whips and tortures, by fire and the sword, nay, if it had only been supported by episcopal fire, and ecclesiastical juris-prudence.—I hope, however, always to defend the religion of Jesus with the same modesty with which he taught it to his disciples, and of which he gave them the most illustrious example. If any one, however, should take umbrage at what I have advanced, I can only say I have gone too far, and truth forbids me to retract. I am obliged then to abide by every thing I have said, even though some bigotted divine, when raised to the purple, should pelt me with his censures, or some court lawyer, invested with the authority of a judge, should direct a condemnation against me.

F I N I S.

